

DISCIPLESHIP GROUPS

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Ezra & Nehemiah - "A Time to Build: A Blueprint for Visionary Leadership"

Session 3: Ezra 7-10

Introduction:

Richard J. Foster said, "To stand before the Holy One of eternity is to change. Resentments cannot be held with the same tenacity when we enter his gracious light." Change is good, but it is not always easy.

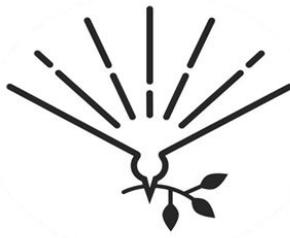
It wasn't easy for those who returned to Jerusalem either. Last week, we learned about the first return, led by Zerubbabel. We read that they completed construction of the Temple, their hearts were filled with joy as they celebrated by keeping Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread.

Almost sixty years have passed, and this week we are introduced to Ezra in Chapter 7. He leads a smaller group from Babylon to Jerusalem almost sixty years later. While their physical location has changed, their obedience has not. They are knowingly breaking God's rules. Change needs to happen and we will see Ezra spiritually lead the people hearts back to God. Change is never easy, but when it is toward God, it is always good.

Questions:

Although many of the remnant have changed their location, they are hesitant to make the necessary changes to their hearts. Are there changes in your life that you know you need to make, but resist?

How does standing before the Holy One change you?



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Day One: Second Return

Read Ezra 7:1-28

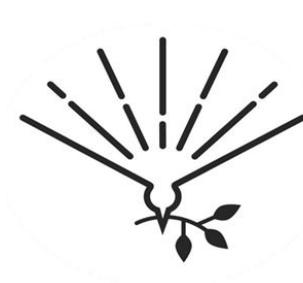
What do we learn about who Ezra is in the verses 1-7?

Why is it important that we learn through Ezra's genealogy that he is a descendant of Aaron the high priest? According to Hebrews 5:1-5, what is the role of a high priest, and who now serves as our High Priest?

According to Artaxerxes, who may go with Ezra (verses 13-14)? What will Artaxerxes provide for those who return?

What was Artaxerxes motivation for graciously supplying, providing, and encouraging Ezra on this journey?

In verses 9-10, Ezra says that he "for the gracious hand of God was on him, Ezra had set his heart to study the Law of the Lord, and do it and to teach his statutes for Israel." Whether we admit it or not, we all have set our hearts on something. What have you set your heart on? Do your actions support the intent of God's will on your heart? If the two aren't aligned, then are you allowing God to set your heart to bring honor to Him?



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Day Two: Journey

Read Ezra 8:1- 22

During a three-day encampment, Ezra reviewed the returning exiles. What problem does Ezra identify in verse 15, how does he solve this problem? Why was it so important that Levites were present?

In verse 21, we see that as soon as Ezra has the right people in place, he proclaims a fast. What is the stated purpose of his fast?

An effective leader can admit their shortcomings. What does Ezra admit in verse 22? In what ways does shame or pride prevent you from effectively leading others toward Christ?

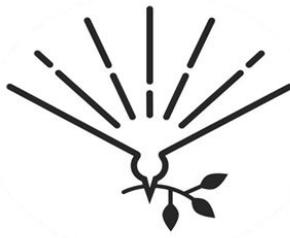
Day Three: Offerings

Read Ezra 8:22-35

We have seen a variety of offerings in this week's reading. What is the difference between a freewill (Ex 35:29, Lev 22:23), burnt (Lev 1) and sin (Lev 4:1-5:13) offering? Why are offerings such an important element of Israel's relationship with God?

What is the phrase that Ezra uses 5 times in chapters 7 and 8? See 8:31. Have we seen indications that this is true? What characteristics of the hand of God have you seen in your life?

How is verse 31 a clear answer to the prayer and fasting of verse 21? How often do you gratefully acknowledge God's answers to your prayers?



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Day Four: Grief Over Sin

Read Chapter 9

Chapter 9 begins with disobedience. The people of Israel have not separated themselves from their neighbors. How do their current actions differ from the instructions God gives the Israelites in Deuteronomy 7:1-6?

Have you ever experienced God's grace and mercy, then later found yourself involved, trapped, or stuck in things God has set you free from before?

How does Ezra handle his grief and who shares in his grief with him (verse 3-5)? What can we learn from his faithfulness in grief?

Read verse 15. How did guilt prevent the returning exiles from standing before God? Does it still prevent us today from standing before God? If so, how?

Prayer is such an integral part of leadership. How does humbling yourself before God in prayer influence your leadership of others?

Day Five: Bitter Weeping

Read Ezra Chapter 10

We read that the people wept bitterly in 10:1. What was the catalyst for their weeping and confession?



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Marriage to certain foreign women were contrary to the law of God and illegal from the onset. This feels harsh from our modern perspective. How does God describe this in Deuteronomy 7:3-4?

While this does feel strange to us, the people of Israel knew these laws. See Ezra 6:21, what do we learn has changed since the first return and now?

Although our circumstances are different, we can glean wisdom from Ezra's leadership. In verse 11, Ezra tells the returned exiles what they must do. What are his instructions? How can we apply these instructions for our own obedience?

What we see in Ezra Chapter 10 is a spiritual return. While Zerubbabel brought the bulk of the exiles back, a physical return, Ezra led the people's hearts back to God. What characterizes a spiritual return? Have you experienced one in your life? What steps do you need to take to return your heart to God?

Day 6: Reflection

What did you learn about God this week?

How can you ask God to impact your leadership this week?